

Memorial Day 2011

Remarks by Terry Stader, Memorial Day Grand Marshall

Thank you Commander Vullo for that introduction.

Welcome: Senator Donoghue; Representative Arciero; Chairman Jefferies; and other honored guests for your presence here today.

I would like to say a special thank you to the American Legion posts that selected me to serve as Grand Marshall for today's ceremonies. It is an honor to do so.

Most importantly, I stand here today honored to be a veteran of our country's Armed Services, and to say thank you on behalf of all veterans deceased - and their families.

I extend sincere appreciation to students, musicians, Scouts, families, our public safety departments and community members who have come today to memorialize them with your presence and your patriotism.

Today is a day set aside to remember and honor those who gave the ultimate sacrifice, losing their life in defense of our country. We, who are here today are the beneficiaries of their service. As American citizens, we are called to a duty of our own - to stop for a moment, and actively remember those past service members who were our ancestors, our loved ones, our neighbors and our friends.

Three years after the Civil War ended, on May 5, 1868, the head of the organization of Union veterans - the Grand Army of the Republic - established Decoration Day as a time for the nation to decorate the graves of the war dead with flowers. Major General John A. Logan declared that Decoration Day should be observed on May 30. It is believed that date was chosen because flowers would be in bloom all over the country.

Gen. Logan's order for his troops was to decorate graves, "with the choicest flowers of springtime." He urged: "We should guard their graves with sacred vigilance. ... Let pleasant paths invite the coming and going of reverent visitors and fond mourners. Let no neglect, no ravages of time, testify to the present or to the coming generations that we have forgotten as a people the cost of a free and undivided republic."

Here, a century and a half later, Westford is extremely fortunate to still hold Memorial Day tributes. Not every community has managed to maintain the tradition.

This week, we saw members of the American Legion walk through each of the cemeteries in Westford to re-flag the veteran gravesites. We also saw a scout complete his Eagle project to repair 30 veterans' grave markers. Our veteran graves have indeed been flagged- "with sacred vigilance"; we have not forgotten our dead in the "ravages of time".

This morning, our Honor Roll readers recited almost 1000 names, names of Westford soldiers who fought in the Revolutionary War through the Gulf Conflict. Westford is fortunate to have not lost anyone to the war in Iraq or Afghanistan. This annual reading of the Honor Roll is our own "testament to the present", showing that we, as a community, know the cost of freedom.

No doubt you came here today to honor the heroes of our Armed Services. But let me share this perspective. As the Veterans' Agent for our town, I often talk with individuals about their time in the service. As I look at their records I see their medals, their decorations.

But when I ask them about their accomplishments, most veterans will tell me they were "just doing their job", doing the things that needed to get done.

Many of our soldiers, who gave their lives while in combat, never thought of themselves as heroes. Retired Army Colonel Len Samborowski says it well.

"What we mean when we talk hero is an ordinary American, who may have come from very ordinary circumstances, who, when faced with an extraordinary challenge, did what needed to be done, accomplishing extraordinary things."

Using his definition of "hero", our purpose in being here today is honorable.

Veterans- both living and dead- are humble heroes- often silent heroes. I would encourage all veterans to share your stories with your family, your friends, anyone, and everyone. Family of veterans who have passed should also talk about the military service of their family members, their history deserves telling and re-telling. It is another citizen duty, that we all help future generations understand

that the act of committing yourself to your country and having the will to fight for the freedom of others, is the most noblest of actions.

Let me extend an invitation today to another memorial- the dedication of Freedom Park located on Pond Street in Forge Village, next Saturday June 4 at noon; this is another Eagle project honoring our veterans living and past. Westford should be proud of the active participation of our local scout organizations in the caretaking of our traditions.

I hope everyone present today can continue to gather together on this special day each year to pay homage to each of our past veterans. Make this day an annual reminder of the need to give of yourself in honor of those who have given everything.

Treat Memorial Day with reverence and respect and others will follow your lead.

Thank you and may God Bless America, and protect our men and women in uniform.